

## **GAA: Crossmolina end our heartbreaks!**

*By: Pdraig Burns*

Crossmolina Deel Rovers 0-16, Nemo Rangers (Cork) 1-12

Van Morrison could have penned his song, 'There'll be days like this', especially for yesterday's (Monday) dramatic victory for Crossmolina in the All-Ireland Club Final.

Chances are, if you're from Crossmolina you will never, ever forget the day that the Deel Rovers captured the Andy Merrigan Cup for the first time in their history.

It was one of those days that will stay in the mind's eye forever and a day.

The emotional post-match celebrations epitomised just how special victory was.

There was a bond there between the players, the management, the club officials and the supporters that had to be witnessed to be appreciated.

Tom Nallen, the team captain, attempted to sum it up when he said that he was accepting the cup on behalf of the people of the parish of Crossmolina, not just the players that had contributed to the most famous day in their history.

When John Bannon blew the whistle for the final time at a tension packed

Croke Park he signalled the start of celebrations that are bound to continue for a very long time.

All-Ireland titles are very hard come by and here in Mayo, even more so. We have all had to travel home from Dublin with that feeling of emptiness in the pits of our stomachs after having watched another contender lose on the big day.

But yesterday was different and the truth is that it always promised to be.

It's hard to put your finger on the reason for it but this Crossmolina team carried real prospects of victory going to Croke Park.

It must be the combination of ability with their attitude that allowed one feel so confident of their prospects. A couple of months ago, prior to their semi-final win over Bellaghy, their trainer, Jarlath Cunningham, told this reporter that they did not go into games anymore hoping to win. "We expect to win games, we're not in the business of hoping," he said.

And Jarlath was proved right yesterday. How else could one explain that terrific second half performance. The first half had all the trappings of another Mayo day out at Croke Park.

The champions of Connacht were not really at the races in that opening half.

They struggled to contain the momentum that Nemo had built up and the reality is that had Barry Heffernan not been at his shot stopping best when making two magnificent saves the Mayo team could have been out of contention at the interval.

However, they weren't, and the three point deficit that they faced at half-time was a manageable one. Particularly, when one considered that

Crossmolina had played at no where near their capability in that first period.

The early stages of the game had resembled anything but an All-Ireland final and there was an unreal lack of atmosphere in the ground.

It may have contributed to the low-key exchanges early on and we had to wait for eight minutes for the first score, a point from a free by Colin Corkery.

The same player doubled the advantage a minute later.

By that stage Crossmolina had already kicked some notable wides and Kieran McDonald was uncharacteristically wide with two efforts from close range.

But at least he was having a go and he reaped the dividends as the game progressed.

Joe Keane kicked the first ever point for Crossmolina in an All-Ireland final when he pointed after ten minutes but Corkery cancelled it out soon after and he widened the

gap to three points after fourteen minutes.

Kieran McDonald hit a fine point from play after taking a pass from Peadar Gardiner but Corkery showed his class when he pointed a free with his left foot after 17 minute.

## **MAGNIFICENT SAVES**

Barry Heffernan made the first of two magnificent saves when he smothered a Corkery effort and Michael Moyles took a good point from play after a fine run from midfield.

A turning point. Well, maybe the Kieran McDonald point after twenty-two minutes that reduced the margin between the teams to three points, 0-7 to 0-4.

Turning point? Well, it was preceded by a bout of possession play by Nemo Rangers that was typical of a team when they're on the ascendancy in a game.

However, their bout of possession was overdone and embellished by a bit of 'showboating' and once Pat McAndrew put a stop to it and the ball was fed to McDonald you knew that if he put it over the bar the odds could yet turn in the favour of Crossmolina.

He pointed in some style and a minute later Peadar Gardiner fisted over after a Paul McGuinness shot had dropped short. Crossmolina were back in the game at this stage and though they finished the half two points down they had done enough to suggest that if they got their game together they could really trouble Nemo.

Even then you knew that nothing less than the best would do for Crossmolina.

Nemo had made scoring look fairly easy in the first half while Crossmolina had to battle very hard for whatever came their way. But the best was what Crossmolina produced. They were magnificent for that thirty minutes, playing with such style and panache that one would have imagined that they were playing in Croke Park every day of the week.

James Nallen and Michael Moyles started to dominate midfield and up front the space started to be created by the unselfish running of Joe Keane and Paul McGuinness.

And then there was Kieran McDonald. There were those who doubted his ability to dominate a game, to take it by the scruff of the neck and dictate proceedings.

Well, if those doubters were in Croker yesterday they're going to have to change their view of him. He was absolutely magnificent and while it's a team game the truth is that had McDonald not lifted his game to the level that he did then Crossmolina would not have won. The sign of greatness.

Within seconds of the restart he hinted at what was to come when took advantage of good approach work by Peadar Gardiner and Paul McGuinness to fire over the bar. Crossmolina were re-energised. McDonald had the gap down to just two points a minute later and though Peadar Gardiner missed a great chance the momentum was very definitely with the Mayo team.

McDonald fired over another point from a free and now the teams were level. Johnny Leonard put them ahead after ten minutes and the superb McDonald increased the lead two minutes later.

## **NEMO HAD NO ANSWER**

Nemo had no answer to the superb team work of the Deel Rovers team though there was a scare in the winners goalmouth midway through the half when Colm

Reilly and Barry Heffernan got their signals mixed up and it took the intervention of Stephen Rochford to prevent Colin Corkery a certain goal. But Corkery did point a free and the Cork representatives were hanging in there. With nine minutes left Kieran McDonald sent over another point from a free and then, Pat McAndrew, with possibly the best score of the game, a left footed drive from out the field, put four between the teams with eight minutes still to play. Sean O'Brien pulled a point back for Nemo but when Liam Moffatt fired Crossmolina four ahead again with just three minutes to play, it was time to start celebrating. But was it? Time was practically up when Colin Corkery somehow found his way to a shooting position and the ball flew past a stranded Barry Heffernan. Now there was just a point between the teams. Crossmolina attacked but instead of keeping possession the ball was let slip and it was punted forward to Colin Corkery. Here comes extra time. Corkery had hardly missed all day but he proved he was human and his shot flew wide. It was time to breath again. Spoke too soon. The referee decided that Barry Heffernan's kick-out hadn't travelled the requisite distance before Tom Nallen gathered the ball and he threw it up between a group of players. Heart in mouth time. We needn't have worried. The ball broke from the ruck of players into the arms of the waiting Kieran McDonald. John Bannon decided enough was enough. Now we could really celebrate. It was time to bring the Andy Merrigan Cup to Mayo and show him around Crossmolina.

**Crossmolina:** Barry Heffernan; Stephen Rochford; Tom Nallen (capt.); Colm Reilly; Peadar Gardiner (0-1); Damian Mulligan; Pat McAndrew (0-1); James Nallen; Michael Moyles (0-1); Joe Keane (0-2); Kieran McDonald (0-7); Enda Lavelle; Paul McGuinness (0-3); Liam Moffatt (0-1); Johnny Leonard.  
Subs.: Gerry O'Malley for Leonard.

**Nemo Rangers:** Dan Steaphy; Larry Kavanagh; Niall Geary; Ivan Gibbons; Kieran Connolly; Stephen O'Brien; Martin Cronin; Derek Kavanagh (0-1); Kevin Cahill (0-1); Sean O'Brien (0-1); Liam Sullivan; David Niblock (0-1); Colin Corkery (1-6); Alan Cronin (0-1); Joe Kavanagh (0-1).  
Subs.: John P. O'Neill for Niblock (inj.); Alan Morgan for O'Sullivan; Maurice McCarthy for Cahill.